

Wellness-Fitness

FEDERAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Traveling Light: Reducing Belly Fat

Recent studies have linked excess fat—especially around the belly—with increased risk for heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer.

You may already suspect that carrying too much fat around your belly is not good for you. However, more and more research is pointing to the true dangers of this type of fat.

The good news is that, unlike some other disease risk factors, we can do something about belly fat. Sure, it's not going to happen overnight, but becoming more active and eating a more healthful diet can have a huge impact on reducing our extra baggage.

In fact, physical activity is a major part of the prescription for losing visceral fat—the fat that surrounds your abdominal organs. A recent study in the *American Journal of Physiology* found that aerobic exercises were more effective than resistance exercises for helping sedentary people burn off this type of deep fat. In addition, research from a recently released study from Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center found that higher soluble fiber intake also helped reduce visceral fat. Adding increased moderate activity to the higher soluble fiber intake made the visceral fat burn away even faster.

So to travel light and lower your risk of disease and early death, try getting a daily dose of:

Aerobic physical activity – walking, running, biking, aerobics dance class, swimming, etc.

Higher intake of soluble fiber – more fruits, vegetables, and legumes (beans, peas, etc.)

Fewer calories – Add more nutritional dense foods, such as fruits and vegetables, to give you more to chew on with fewer calories.

Smaller portion sizes – You can still have things you enjoy, just a lot less of it. Have a “sliver,” a “taste,” a “bite,” and savor the flavor.

More movement – This is beyond your regular exercise routine. Remember to move when you're at work and at home. Even set a timer so that you don't sit longer than 20 minutes. If you're watching TV, do a little exercising or stretching as you watch, get up during every commercial and go run some mini-errand in the house. The human body was not designed to be sedentary; it was made to move.

More water – Sometimes it's difficult for your body to distinguish between thirst and hunger signals, so make sure you keep

yourself well hydrated. Drinking two glasses of water before a meal can help alleviate the thirst and make your stomach feel more full, so that you will eat less.

So, let go of some of that extra weight you're carrying and enjoy the lighter and healthier ride. □



Rev Up Your Day: A Full-Body, 10-Minute Workout

You've told yourself that you don't have time to work out. But you do find time to take a ten-minute break to walk down to your favorite coffee emporium every day. Why not use those ten minutes for something else that will increase your mental and physical energy—like a quick workout?

You can do two sets of 10 to 12 repetitions for each exercise in a circuit—performing each exercise once in the order presented and then repeating the sequence.

CRUNCHES

This will be your warm-up movement. Warming up the abdominal core gets the blood flowing without straining any joints.

Start by anchoring your lower back to the floor. Next, curl the torso up as high as you can, strongly exhaling as you come up. As you inhale, return your upper body to the floor with the same slow, controlled movement as when you came up.



PUSH-UPS

Start on your stomach, palms facing down and in line with your shoulders. Then, push up as if you're pushing the ground away from you. You can keep your knees on the ground if you're having trouble doing the movement in a slow and controlled manner. As you gain strength, you'll be able to have only the hands and feet in contact with the floor during your extension.



LUNGES

Take a big step forward, so that you're in a lunge position. Bend the front leg, lowering the upper body in a slow and controlled manner. Then, slowly lift the body up with the same controlled movement with which you lowered it. Next, switch legs and do the exercise on the other side. NOTE: To avoid injury, don't extend your front knee past your toes when you lower your body.



JUMPING JACKS

Start with the feet together, arms by your side. Then, jump the feet out sideways, landing lightly while spreading the arms up and out, making an x-shape. Inhale as you extend out; exhale as you return to your starting position.



Snack Time: Top Priority—Nutrition

Finding a snack at work can be a nutritional minefield at times. Most vending machines and convenience stores commit much of their space to the sale of high-fat, high-sugar choices.

Nutrition First

If you've realized that the cards are stacked against you, try a new, healthier tactic—choose nutrition first by bringing your own healthier selections from home.

Fruits and vegetables next

When it comes to high nutrition, you can't beat fruits and vegetables. Snack time is the perfect time to catch up on your fruit and vegetable intake. A half-cup serving of oranges in the morning and a cup of cut raw vegetables—like red bell peppers, broccoli, or carrots—in the afternoon can help you keep your diet healthy and colorful.

Add a little protein and fiber

Another good snack choice would be something that combines a bit of protein with a whole grain, like a half of a peanut butter sandwich on whole grain bread. Hummus also provides protein and fiber from legumes (chickpeas) and seeds (sesame seed butter). You can dip vegetables or whole grain pita in it for a light and nutritious snack. The protein “sticks with you” as your body processes it and the whole grain will give you fiber and bulk—both help you feel satisfied longer.

Portion size awareness

And remember, it's not just what you eat; it's also how much you eat—the size of the portions and the number of servings each day. For example, dry roasted and raw seeds (sunflower, pumpkin seeds, etc.) tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews, etc.), and peanuts are great higher protein snacks. The only thing is, you'll have to keep in mind the serving is surprisingly small and high in calories. A serving for seeds or nuts is about a quarter (1/4) cup—just a small handful and you're done for the day.

Check out your serving size on the package for trail mix, too, since it tends to have a fair share of nuts, seeds, and dried fruits. While a handful of nuts will cost you 170 calories or more, depending on the type, an apple can be a little over 40 calories and a large carrot about 30 calories.

By making nutrition a top priority—along with just a little planning and organization—you can have healthy, well-portioned snacks that can carry you through those low blood sugar slumps during the workday. □



Staying Sharp: A Few Tips for Maintaining Mental Acuity

Most everybody wants to stay as mentally sharp as possible. Whether you're 25 or 65, it's embarrassing to forget an appointment, a colleague's name, or a task you were going to do.



How can we improve our mental acuity—or at least keep our brains functioning as well as possible as we age? Fortunately, medical science has been studying this question and coming up with some useful answers.

As it turns out, many of the activities that keep you physically and emotionally healthy also keep your mind in peak condition.

Get physical

Neuroscientists have found that the human brain tends to shrink as it gets older. In fact, the hippocampus—a part of the brain important to memory and learning—tends to shrink about one percent each year starting in our late 20s. But vigorous physical exercise slows the rate of decline.

Scientists have even found that exercise spurs our brains to create new neurons, which may help cognitive functioning.

Get some Omega-3s

Maintaining a balanced diet is also helpful. A recent study published in the journal *Neurology* indicates that omega-3 fatty acids—a popular supplement mostly derived from fish oils and some plant seed oils, like flax and chia—may play a special role in reducing the rate of brain aging.

Get some good sleep

Sleep plays a key role in how our memory functions. While some aspects of memory are still not fully understood, it seems that converting short-term memories (what we did today) to long-term memories (what we did a month or a year ago) occurs mostly during our sleep.

Get social

A growing concern is how to help people retain their cognitive functioning as long as possible as they age. The conventional wisdom for years has been that older folks can best keep their smarts by doing mentally demanding

tasks like crossword puzzles, Sudoku, or learning a new language. The latest research indicates that while mental gymnastics are good, maintaining an active social life may be more important.

A number of studies have shown the value of social interaction for memory, including a recent study from the Harvard School of Public Health that showed a link between being socially engaged and having a slower rate of memory loss.

An especially good approach may be to combine social activities with a mentally demanding task, like playing bridge or other card games, for example, which requires both a strong memory and the ability to read social cues. □

